



## Journalism Education in Bangladesh: In Search for an Integrated Curricula Framework

Mohammad Sahid Ullah  
*School of Communication and Arts*  
*University of Queensland, Australia*  
*m.ullah2@uq.edu.au*

Rawshon Akhter  
*Department of Communication and Journalism*  
*University of Chittagong, Bangladesh*  
*rawshon2007\_cu@yahoo.com*

### ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with a lack of an agreed framework for the curriculum of journalism education in Bangladesh. Starting from the want of any agreement between educators and professionals, which has hindered its journalism education as a mature discipline in Western higher education, the article argues that a lack of agreed values and beliefs about the journalism profession itself still persists in Bangladesh. Examining the existing curricula, facilities and capacities at 14 different public and private universities of Bangladesh, this article focuses on the generic problems of framing a comprehensive curriculum and the challenges ahead in the corporatization of local media industry, privatization of knowledge institutions, and new media intervention by clarifying curricular differences. It also tries to help point the way forward following basic principles of journalism curricula in Bangladesh's context. The result also comes out from 35 interviews with media management people, senior journalists and former journalism graduates working in media houses and journalism department heads. This study finds that Bangladeshi university journalism curricula and pedagogue style cannot fulfill the demand that seeks in the media houses due to the curricula's inadequate focus on practical courses, technological inadequacies in the university and controversy over the mission and merit of university-based journalism education.

**Keywords:** Journalism education, curricula framework, Bangladesh

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has witnessed a 'quantum leap' in the media sector but journalism as a profession remains uncertain and volatile (Rahman, 2016:333). The BBC Media Action Bangladesh report encapsulates this media situation as having "mushroomed" over the past 10 years, with a large range of highly profitable newspapers and satellite TV channels (Rolt, 2012: 2). This thriving of media outlets (138 new dailies, 84 weekly magazines, 25 television channels, 12 commercial FM radio, 16 community radios and several hundred online news portals) creates a large demand for professionally-ready human resources in the industry. Millennials in Bangladesh have subsequently become increasingly attracted to journalism courses considering both their job prospects and the projected glamor of the industry. Taking into account the imminent needs of the industry (work-ready graduates) combined with students' interest (job and glamor), public and private universities have expanded journalism and media education across the country (Ullah, 2013).

Journalism education at the university level, has only emerged in the past half century in Bangladesh. An argument still revolves around how journalism should be taught, what curricula to impose and how to best prepare a competent workforce employable to the media industries. Universities are offering journalism courses under the larger umbrella of mass communication and media studies. Educators (e.g., Kabir, 2011; Rahman, 1999; Ullah, 2008) and professionals (e.g., Haque, 2009, Khan, 1998; Khan, 2011) opine that university level journalism education in Bangladesh remains a contested field. The contestation is not confined only between professionals and educators on the necessity of university journalism education and how it would be taught with what curriculum, but also among journalism educators themselves (e.g., Rahman, 1999; Nasreen and Mahmud, 2009; Ullah, 2013). It is generally assumed that due to a lack of adequate research on journalism course curricula and pedagogy, educators cannot present any concrete framework for how journalism curriculum is being organized, or how journalism is being taught across institutions nor why it has been taught in a particular way at their institutions during the last five decades.

Reasons often given for the slow pace of progress include the current trend in changing values among professionals - generally from public service (with a mission to serve society) to commercialization (where reporting is merely a job and a media outlet a business). Yet at the same time, professors adapt to the changes in the media market (the corporatization of media firms driving the commercialization of the journalism profession), the increasing privatization of education and knowledge, impacts of globalization, and the exponential growth and use of technology in journalism, which by itself demands new curricula and teaching facilities. Examining journalism curricula (including pedagogy and books used) at 14 public and private universities, this study focuses on the challenges ahead resulting from the industry climate in terms of both ideology and technology, along with the globalization of journalism education, the commercialization of knowledge in association with the dominance of West-centric curricula, and the balance between vocational and academic teaching. Again, the goal here is to work towards a suitable journalism curriculum for Bangladesh.

This inquiry, in addition to administering open-ended questions among educators, and media professionals' attempts to discover differences between what journalism graduates learned, thought, and planned during their studies versus their professional duties after graduating. They also detail what problems they encountered at their respective media outlets as journalism graduates, particularly in dealing with supervisors (shift-in charge, news editor, chief reporter). The major conclusion is that Bangladeshi universities' journalism curricula is not fulfilling the profession's demands (in respect to organizing and writing news stories from the information gathered from sources, techno-friendliness) due to the curricula's inadequate focus on practical courses, universities' technological inadequacies, and controversy over the mission and merit of university-based journalism education.

## 2.0 JOURNALISM AND JOURNALISM EDUCATION: THE CONCEPT

What is journalism - is it a part of a broader media field or a distinct field? There is no agreement on the issue among journalism educators and professionals (French, 2006; Hanitzsch, 2007; Sanjay, 2012). Even though there is widespread agreement on the basic skills of journalism: news gathering, news writing and news production, conflicting understandings of the concepts of 'journalism profession' and 'journalism education' have been widely debated for decades (Claussen, 2007; Deuze, 2005; Drok, 2012; French, 2006; Loo, 2005; Muppidi, 2008). French (2006) pointed out that disagreement about what journalism is and what journalism education is relates to whether journalism is considered a public service or predominantly a commercial enterprise or both simultaneously. Journalism as part of a commercial enterprise (and, in fact, almost all journalism worldwide is paid for by for-profit companies) can lead to it being subsumed both in industry and academia as just another part of the huge mass media industry. However, journalism as public service (and thus profession) strongly suggests it be defined as a "distinct academic field" not a separate discipline (French, 2006:465). Its public service role is strengthened to the extent that journalism is regarded as neutral, objective, and fair, and as a necessary support for democratic government, even if journalism's value in that regard varies over time and place rather than being static. Its commercial role is however advocated less, yet can be claimed to be a more accurate reflection of how today's news media actually operates.

Journalism educators (e.g., Blom & Devenport, 2012; Dork, 2012; Nordenstreng, 2010) identified that the traditional public service role today, never pure or ideal, is facing even more challenges--from information and communication technologies, globalization, and worldwide consumerism and individualism over collectivism. In addition, journalistic standards including objectivity and truth have been critiqued by the philosophies of structuralism and post structuralism. French (2006) and Hanitzsch (2007) both argue, as French (2006:465) puts it that there is a direct connection between these differing views and the form and structure given to journalism education. She asserts, the skills are common to all programs, but "journalism and media programs tend to be brought together for components of the curriculum if no distinction is perceived between journalism and other areas of media practice." In short, if journalism's social, democratic role is emphasized, the commercial function of the media/press will tend to be neglected and a professional curriculum will include political and social theories and themes, and vice versa (although few journalism degree programs worldwide are excellent at teaching the nexus between media content, popularity, and profitability, or even the well-established subfield of media management/economics).

Journalism seems to fulfill the criteria of a profession, or at least it could and should, even if journalism isn't quite a distinct profession in most countries. From the above contested and tricky interpretations of journalism, we can adopt French's definition of journalism as "an intellectual activity requiring specialized competence, autonomy, and an ethical code reflecting its public service role" (French, 2006:465). Professions are also often characterized by requiring a particular education, requiring a government-issued or approved license, continuing education, and other markers, which in journalism's case vary widely

among countries and even professionals themselves. But based only on journalism's public service similarities worldwide, journalism education should be oriented towards professionalism. Where journalism is widely, even if not universally, regarded simply as a craft or trade journalism education can and has been reduced to the acquisition of a set of skills. Thus, journalism education generally and the curriculum in particular can be developed through either (or both) a professional model and a craft model (Deuze, 2006; Dork, 2012; Muppidi, 2008). The 'Professional model' emphasizes the development of critical thinking of graduates/ future journalists regarding society, culture and economy while the 'Craft model' is more concerned about the development of skills required for practical journalistic pursuits. UNESCO (2007) Model Curricula however has found that journalism education in universities across the globe is organized around three curricular axes or lines of development.

The 'Model curriculum for journalism education for developing countries and emerging democracies' by UNESCO emphasizes inclusion of prerequisites for both intellectual and craft skills. These foundations are: (a) An ability to think critically, incorporating skills in comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of unfamiliar material, and a basic understanding of evidence and research methods; (b) An ability to write clearly and coherently using narrative, descriptive and analytical methods; (c) A knowledge of national and international political, economic, cultural, religious, and social institutions; and (d) A knowledge of current affairs and issues and a general knowledge of history and geography (UNESCO: 2007: 8). However, Freedman, Rendahl and Shafer (2009: 22) claimed, "the model suffers from the fact that its origins are in universities or foundations, rather than in newsrooms or professional journalism organizations." This, in turn, strongly suggests that UNESCO's model curriculum is overwhelmingly consistent with the existing West-centric, supposedly universal, understanding of journalism that refuses to accept local models. Indeed, Bangladeshi media and journalism educators immediately rejected UNESCO's curriculum (UNESCO-Bangladesh: 2009). Advocacy for the practice of *Ubuntu* journalism in Africa (Shaw, 2009), Development journalism in Asia and Latin America (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Skjerdal, 2011; Ullah & Akhter 2002) and Mindful journalism in central and East Asia (Seneviratne, 2011) directly challenge the existing model. Bangladeshi journalists and journalism professors are no further along in coming to an agreement or making plans than they were before. Either way, one must look first at the current status of journalism education and curriculum in Bangladesh.

### 3.0 JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND CURRICULA: THE BANGLADESH LANDSCAPE

Journalism education began its journey in the Bangladesh territory in 1962 through the establishment of the Department of Journalism at the University of Dhaka (DU), which began offering a diploma degree course in the subject. But professionals did not widely accept journalism as a subject of study until the 1990s. After the quick expansion of the media industry in a little more than a decade, especially the growth of private television channels at the dawn of the new millennium, journalism has become a lucrative subject in which to offer university degrees. To provide a skilled workforce immediately, both public and private universities, and other institutions have expanded educational services in accordance with the needs of the media industry. As a result, eight public and 11 private universities have launched journalism/ media/ communication departments in between 2001 to 2015. A total of 23 public and private Bangladeshi universities offer communication and journalism education.

Of these, four public universities (Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jagannath) and two private universities (Stamford and Daffodil) have graduate-level programs. The Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) provides a one-year Postgraduate Diploma and recently (from 2016) offers Master Degree in journalism under the National University. Non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also offer various short courses in journalism, radio and TV news presentation, film and photography, and public relations. About 1200 students are enrolled on average for diploma, undergraduate, and graduate programs, and about 300 students graduate every year. With the exception of PIB, journalism is not taught in a separate degree program or department in any Bangladeshi universities, instead the curriculum is combined with mass communication or media studies courses.

During a 54-year journey, Bangladeshi journalism curricula have metamorphosed as mass communication and journalism, communication and journalism, or media and journalism studies with a wider perspective. Ullah (2013:197) pointed out that journalism education has run through seven different paradigms during the decades: (1) vocational training to diploma, (2) journalism alone to mass communication combined with journalism, (3) an interdisciplinary approach, (4) a liberal humanistic to social science approach, (5) a technology-poor to technology-rich approach, (6) privatization of public education, and (7) collaborative efforts with foreign universities. All of these paradigmatic shifts were enforced from an appreciation of realities on the ground in journalism practice. For example, in the case of the second shift (journalism alone to mass communication and journalism), DU journalism educators found

communication and media as great mobility multipliers and agents to modernity. Rahman (1999:143) explains, “This way of thinking resulted in the shift of journalism education from mere journalism to mass communication and journalism.”

In the cases of the third (interdisciplinary approach) and fourth (liberal humanistic to social science) shifts, journalism education metamorphosed into media or communication programs without apparent attention to the curriculum’s connection to potential media jobs in Bangladesh. Such a shift was required not because of a narrow need to prepare competent professionals, but rather to fulfill the demand from students to widen the scope of their job opportunities and be well-equipped workers for any media-related profession (Ullah, 2008). This move by journalism departments towards social science faculties, however, “could not satisfy the various job markets created by the Bangladeshi mass media industry’s needs” (Ullah: 2008:7). The last three shifts – from technology-poor to a technology-rich approach, the privatization of public education, and more collaborative efforts with foreign universities – expose the shortcomings of journalism educators in their syllabi and pedagogy styles. Journalism educators meanwhile also face tremendous pressure to redesign course curricula to address the main issues – the demands from the industry, commercialization of university education, and globalization or internalization of journalism and media education. Though DU experienced all seven shifts, other university departments primarily adopted the latter shift (collaborative efforts with foreign universities, and otherwise accommodating and facilitating globalization of journalism education) and have been following almost the same Western curricula adopted by DU without careful analysis of its necessity in local context. The exception is that of private universities, almost key private universities (e. g Independent, Liberal Arts) offering new courses mainly around technology responding to market demands. The result is that no universities offer a pure journalism degree with strong emphasis on professionalism (e g, ethical practice, public service and pro-people journalism), and instead focus their efforts towards a technology-savvy curriculum.

Journalism syllabi at different state-run (public and autonomous) and private universities have traditionally covered practical skills training and a general contextual education under a liberal arts or social sciences umbrella, with the aim of developing and preparing proficient workers with analytical skills like gathering information, quickly writing stories to a deadline, and ultimately serving the people, society, and the nation through reporting. A 2009 UNESCO-Bangladesh survey found 472 courses under different titles offered at nine university departments, including 132 journalism-focused courses. The survey reported that the syllabi for these courses cover a wide range of topics in mass communication, media studies, digital productions to language and sociology, along with some basic journalism courses. The survey shows that syllabi included 72 practice-oriented courses and 60 theory-based courses (UNESCO-Bangladesh 2009: 25). Moving from these points above, this study aims to provide an in-depth inquiry on the nature of curricula and pedagogy along with capacity-what problems educators encounter in preparing work-ready graduates as well as the issue of an integrated curricula framework through asking five specific research questions;

**RQ1:** How do journalism education institutions in Bangladesh face the new challenges?

**RQ2:** What kind of constraints journalism educators encounter with when they try to produce work-ready graduate for media institutions?

**RQ3:** What is the reason of undervaluing journalism graduates during recruitment in media houses?

**RQ4:** What quality journalism education media management seeks from the new entrants?

**RQ5:** How do the journalism schools accommodate new issues in context of curriculum design with what pedagogy?

#### 4.0 METHOD AND SAMPLES

This study is primarily based on the analysis of the curricula, reading material facilities and other pertinent information available in the 14 departments (four public and 10 private universities). In addition, this study’s outcome is based on in-depth interviews with 35 respondents (seven editors/ chief news editors, 22 reporters/ sub-editors [copyeditors]/ Radio and television producers mainly from Dhaka and six department heads both from public and private universities from across country who are directly involved with curricula design, structural planning and implementation of all activities in the departments. Among media professionals, three editors and five news editors (who are involved in news staff selection process), two are sub-editors (newspaper and news agency), six are reporters (two from newspapers, three from television and one from online).

Three separate open-ended questionnaires with six questions each were sent to respondents between January and March 2012. These were followed up by telephone, and answers were collected through individual email contact. Sixty journalists were initially contacted through email and 35 responded. Journalism graduate participants answered questions about what qualities editors/news editors consider during employee recruitment and the problems they face during the initial stages of their work. This line of inquiry was used in order to gauge the differences between what journalism graduates learned, thought, and planned during their studies versus their experiences after graduating. Therefore the focus was on what problems they encountered at their respective media outlets as journalism graduates, mainly in dealing with their supervising professionals.

Supervising professionals (editors, chief reporters and shift-in-charge) were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of journalism graduates and the needs considered during their recruitment, where the gaps are exist between education and recruitments qualities while questions for educators included the perceived needs and challenges that they face to produce work-ready professionals. They were also asked why they follow that particular syllabus, what problems they were encountered when it comes question of necessity to redesign their curriculum and what they need to face those questions, how journalism department can accommodate the demand from industry with what steps and finally what framework is required to enhance the quality of journalism education in Bangladesh. The findings reported here are from available facilities in the departments and the interview answers from the respondents. Different themes have been identified through careful scrutinizing of offering courses in the syllabi and direct quotations have been used to extrapolate the standpoints of the respondents on journalism education in Bangladesh.

## 5.0 FINDINGS

The evidence gathered in this study found that Bangladeshi journalism education institutions face a number of challenges which include: adapting to the rapid growth of the media industry's preferred technologies, lack of availability of techno-skilled teaching staff, insufficient funds for commissioning research on media and journalism education, need for quality reading materials (books and journals), curricula guidelines addressing local necessities and a need for standardizing *how* journalism is taught and *what* should be taught. The following discussion elaborates on the answers from respondents. These are organized by following the inquiry aims put forth in the methodology- namely the differences between what journalism graduates learned, thought, and planned during their studies versus after graduating, and what problems they encountered at their respective media outlets as journalism graduates, particularly in dealing with supervisors' expectations. The major issues that surfaced were curricula, readings, pedagogue and controversy over the mission and merit of university education in journalism. The commercialization of media industries as well as the increased importance of digital technology and new media is also influential while more traditional factors (e g, poor writing skills, source surfing) are still important challenges. These specific challenges are addressed in turn in the following sections:

### 5.1 Curricula

The study has found that a total of 629 courses are being offered at 14 universities. Private universities include technology-savvy courses in journalism to respond to contemporary demands in the media job market. These courses include: computer-assisted reporting, online publication, and editing for print and electronic media. Meanwhile, the market requirement courses include: screenplay and program production, multimedia production, TV production skills (studio and live broadcasting techniques), script writing for radio and television, documentary production, news presentation and anchoring, radio and TV drama, commercial production and digital imaging. Evidence shows that in updated syllabi universities put the key focus on new media, along with more traditional courses such as reporting, editing, feature writing, investigative reporting, interpretative reporting, editorial writing, and newspaper page design/layout. Existing course curricula in all public and private universities can be divided into theory, practice, and study under five major curriculum categories: (1) communication studies, (2) journalism/media reporting, writing and production, (3) social sciences, (4) media research tools and (5) online publication and webcast.

The most outstanding fact that emerged is that while public universities are still concentrating on traditional journalism curricula, combining subjects from social sciences and liberal arts to make well-rounded graduates, private universities emphasize the application of new technologies for current job requirements of the media industries. Public universities offered between 120 to 128 credits, with 32 to 40 courses at undergraduate levels and 32-40 credits at master's level with a variety of optional courses. Private universities on the other hand offer more practical courses with 120 credits. All new universities follow more or less a similar prototype curriculum from the three mother universities (Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Chittagong)

except the University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh (ULAB), Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) and Jagannath University (JnU).

In addition to the difference of course content and credit distribution, an inconsistency was found regarding which courses will be taught in which year/semester. There is also no unique understanding on grading (mark distribution) patterns for practical vs. theory courses, and division on the core versus optional/allied courses. The data set reveals that the University Grants Commission (UGC) authorizes private university curricula while academic council of particular public university authorized curricula after having department's approval. For such rule (see for detail: [www.ugc.bd](http://www.ugc.bd)), public universities enjoy the scope of incorporating new courses every year, while the private universities need to wait for UGC decisions for final approval (which usually takes several years). In spite of this discriminatory approval system, evidence indicates most departments revamped their curricula over the past two years by introducing new courses oriented around new media technology.

Curricula are apparently designed differently at private universities as well. For instance, ULAB students are required to complete 42 courses (126 credits). After taking 12 mandatory courses covering basic areas of mass communication, media studies, and journalism in the first year, students choose one of three concentration areas (mass communications, digital production, and journalism). Students must complete 10 non-media courses (7 mandatory and 3 electives) such as English, introduction to computers, Bangladesh studies, and Bangla language and world civilization. The media syllabus also includes five courses as minor studies: business, computer science, and English. IUB students get themselves admitted to the university – rather than to the department. After completing 30 credits in foundations/liberal arts courses, students declare their major – media and communications. Students are required to cover a total of 128 credits in four years. University of Development Alternative (UODA) has four different streams – film, video & TV production, journalism, advertising, and development communications. There is no declared stream in other universities' syllabi, however other universities syllabi are designed with an array of new, conventional, or traditional courses and distributed over the four years as per level/year.

This study's evidence found a prevailing consensus for redesigning the curricula between academics and professionals with the help of professional journalists. Except DU, no other university has included professionals in the curriculum design process. The lack of availability of quality experts is seen as one reason for non-inclusion of professionals is for their “shoddy experience in the context of professional standards” (Jahangir Kabir, Chairperson of Green University). This kind of undervaluation has widened the distance between senior professionals and faculty members in outlining an industry-friendly framework for journalism curriculum.

## 5.2 Pedagogy

Journalism education traditionally covers practical skills training on the one hand, and general contextual education and liberal arts courses on the other. Although the specific needs and demands of media systems differ from region to region and are largely determined by (and are a reflection of) the particular culture, law, and history within which they are taught, the delicate balance between practical and contextual knowledge has always been the main area of contention within journalism programs. Our study reveals that most journalism curricula focus 60 percent of their curriculum on theory-based courses, including communication, development, health and population studies, with the remaining 40 percent covering journalism topics such as reporting and editing, feature writing, radio and television journalism, and specialized reporting (environment journalism, finance and business journalism and so forth). Although 70 percent of journalism course content is practical, the delivery of practical classes is difficult if not impossible due to lack of lab facilities in the departments. The general instructions and classroom lectures for practical courses, even those focusing on technology, are reliant on books and devoid of practical demonstration.

The study, further revealed that journalism departments are still very much skewed towards print media, though opportunities are opening up in electronic media. Universities are yet to wake up to the importance of electronic media in order to help students take advantage of this needed opportunity. Expressing his dissatisfaction at the pedagogue, *Prothom Alo* reporter Jahangir Shah opines that journalism students enter the profession after going through 4/5 year-long university programs where the departments must draft their curricula planning 10 years ahead of the prospective trends of journalism. He says, “*I was taught about the 'horseshoe shade table' for sub-editors [copyeditors] but never have I seen this kind of table in my newsroom. Discarding such old-fashioned ideas, new concepts should be incorporated in journalism education now*” he added.

The pedagogy in journalism education was found to be problematic. Classes are being conducted by faculty with decades-old experience, who are not prepared to anticipate the needs of the industry in the present, let alone anticipate the future needs of the industry when their students graduate and enter the

workforce. Educators are faced with a dilemma about teaching methods, whether it is their role to be a coach, or a player in the classroom teaching. This study has found that all private universities and two of the public universities offer four courses in a semester of six months' duration while the other universities offer eight to 10 courses in a traditional year-based curriculum. Journalism educators have different opinions about the system and make important observations about practical courses. For instance, DU Professor Golam Rahman opines, "*there is no debate on the necessity of practical courses, but questions as to what and how these courses are to be taught lead to disputes about the integrity of Bangladeshi journalism degrees*". Almost all respondents agree that laboratory facilities are essential for practical courses and departments must incorporate students' production, photography, or radio/TV labs. But evidence indicates that students do not have free access to equipment and laboratories at their institutions. For example, DU doesn't allow students to work independently in the media lab, equipped with 1998-model machinery, due to security concerns.

### 5.3 Readings

Journalism education institutions suffer from relying on outdated textbooks, which do not work well in fast-changing media environments. Aging texts (mainly Asia Foundations donated) are the key reading resource in most universities. This study found a total of 397 recommended books in different universities. DU recommends the lowest number of books (252) and CU recommends the highest number of books (462) as references study. Other university curricula recommend between 261 and 454 books (*M-302*). The highest number of reference books recommended for a technology-related course is 21 (at DIU) and the lowest number is three for mass media laws and regulations (at RU). With the exception of media and journalism history and political and social development of Bangladesh, including Bangla language courses, most core course books are either from the USA or from the UK. Syllabi include many outdated books (e.g., *New Survey of Journalism* by George Fox Mott -1961) as reference reading. Reporting and editing courses recommend an average of 10-12 books, including at least three in the Bengali language. Although journalism educators and media practitioners have recently started publishing some books on journalism and communication in Bengali, the small market opportunity discourages publishers while a few attempts translating books has been acknowledged by the government's publishing house (Bangla Academy).

## 6.0 ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

This study has found journalism educators often aspire to keep pace with the fast-moving media industry and any change in the industry influences or affects the syllabus-redesign process. As the nature of the profession has changed dramatically in recent years, due to the corporatization of the industry, globalization and new media technologies along with the dispute between educators and professionals, journalism departments feel a necessity to cope with the rate of change. These changes frustrate journalism educators in reaching any comprehensive agreement on what syllabi would best fit the potential needs. These main challenges are discussed in the following sections to help find a contextual solution in regard to preparing a suitable and adaptive course curriculum for journalism students at Bangladesh universities.

### 6.1 Professionals vs. Educators

Media industry people often complain that when they employ a journalism graduate, they discover that the graduate's skill set does not meet their needs. For instance, *Amader Somoy* editor Nayeemul Islam Khan notes, "*graduates lack the skills of gathering information and writing news, fail to develop and cultivate news sources and have poor language skills*." New journalism in particular requires several qualities described by Morshed Noman, Chief Reporter of *ABC Radio*:

*"a new entrant should have a clear conception of the trade of journalism, a reasonable knowledge base of the basics of journalism, language skills, computer aptitudes and should not be tech-shy. She should have basic writing/editing/flairs and, above all, high standards of ethical and moral values."*

In such a way it has been understood that beginners do not qualify for a job in spite of all the degrees if they do not write well, have no instinct for news, or lack general analytical ability.

Shamshun Nahar, a newly appointed sub-editor of *Dainik Kaler Khantho*, agrees that she does not think the course curriculum that she studied in university is adequate to fulfill the demands she has encountered in the profession. Because, she explains,



*"I did not have an opportunity to learn how to do page make-up for print media and I didn't even know how to operate a video camera, which is mandatory for reporting in electronic media. I also did not have an internship program at the end of my bachelor's course".*

Nasimul Ahsan, an online journalist and recent journalism graduate (in 2012) said; *"I spent seven years in university [for journalism study]; I don't see any symmetry between what is put in the syllabi and what I am taught in the class."* He observed a big gap between the profession and the teaching in university departments and further said, *"If journalism is considered a profession, I can say all these courses have no value in the profession itself. Departments could not settle on anything that is relevant for our own society. Perhaps western exposure of our teachers is a major cause."* He goes on to suggest that classrooms must discuss the local trends of profession in order to be relevant.

Zahedul Pinto, News Editor of *Desh Television*, opines that there is a common understanding among professionals that journalism departments are producing more graduates to work in public relations and development organizations rather than in journalism. Though more students from journalism departments are joining the profession nowadays, he said, *"in addition to the drawbacks of education provided in university departments, brilliant journalism graduates don't like to take on the hazards in the profession. Quality journalism is, therefore, still a need in Bangladesh."*

This study observed that the curriculum in many universities is a blend of liberal arts and social sciences. Though the contestation encircled the interdisciplinary blend, journalism educators support this standpoint. Daffodil advisory Professor Shakawat Ali Khan posed the following question in defense of the relevance of this approach:

*"Without understanding the story context, how do professional journalists gather information, fix story angles and finally play a role as watchtower in a developing society like Bangladesh?... Unless a journalism student [media professional] can connect with the social needs through vocation, the knowledge is not as valuable."*

## 6.2 Globalization of media and journalism education

Extension of West-centric universalization of higher education makes it more difficult to accommodate local knowledge. Loo (2005) presents three profound reasons for such adaptations around the world - first, the 'modern' system of education itself has been adopted from the West; second, as a discipline of knowledge or as an academic field of study, communication, media, and journalism first gained recognition and evolved in the West, particularly in the United States; third and most of all, the triumph of 'globalization' (Westernization/Americanization as Globalization, and West is the Best psyche) has been the decisive factor in this regard.

Explaining the Asian crisis in journalism education, Lee (2008:62) recognized a need to appreciate the international agenda, but also how essential it is to not ignore points that meet local needs and aspirations. For instance, while globalization trends lead institutions to introduce business and financial reporting, environment, disaster reporting and so forth, with some added importance in their curricula, Bangladesh urgently needs to stress development journalism and agriculture reporting, because these sectors are still struggling to have any attention in the syllabi. Reaz Ahmed, News Editor of the *Daily Star*, explains the issue:

*"It is a challenge now to focus on micro issues, localized problems and prospects particularly, more so as the world is now tuned to the trend of 'globalization' and media are, to some extent, obsessed with so-called big political, economic issues and with news of the 'corporate world.' The challenge is now to bring the 'peoples' concerns' onto the public sphere through a wider media scape."*

This is a "double challenge", he says, for media and journalism educators in the coming days in Bangladesh.

## 6.3 Commercialization of knowledge

The normative practice is that higher education is to be all about gathering knowledge and generating new ideas. But nowadays the major purposes of education in Bangladesh, mainly in private institutions, are fixated on 'earning,' rather than 'learning' or 'gathering knowledge.' Employability is the key indicator in determining how successful the education system or a particular academic institution is, and the marketplace becomes the driving force for education. The media are no exception. Job prospects for media graduates in the multi-media sector have considerably increased in Bangladesh. To address the demands of various job markets, university education opened to the private sector in the 1990s. Currently, 52 private

universities are offering regular honors and master's programs, as well as evening and professional master's programs, diploma programs mainly in the disciplines that have some market demand such as business administration (BBA and MBA), information technology, engineering, English, and medicine, leaving a relatively negligible interest in humanities and social sciences.

The recent boom in both the television and newspaper industries and the inadequate courses for studies in journalism at public universities however has given private universities the opportunity to launch programs in journalism/media and communication. It is obvious that private universities have expanded the opportunity and space for higher learning in journalism, but their programs are not highly ranked because they suffer from inadequate faculties, unavailability of technical resources, and lack of a well-designed up-to-date curricula and a pedagogical approach. In most cases, their programs seem almost prototypes of the programs at public universities, with minimal diversity.

#### 6.4 Technology and New Media Intervention

The arrival of mobile telephones, the launch of Internet service, the influence of new media in print technology (online news portal and entrepreneurship journalism), and the satellite television revolution has enormously changed the face of media industry in Bangladesh. In light of these changes, journalism has become a technology-driven discipline and profession. The UNESCO-Bangladesh survey found that the country's journalism departments have no such equipment, let alone optimum equipment to adequately teach practical courses around new media technologies and production. In the context of such a frustrating reality, these departments cannot keep pace with the growing needs in the industry.

To address the challenges of technological evolution, journalism departments require a good amount of modern equipment and a well-established infrastructure to provide hands-on and vocational education to their students. This need is most pronounced at the country's public universities. Helena Ferdousi, head of MCJ at JnU says, *"Departments only have some computers, internet, one or two video cameras for providing hands-on education to our students. As a result, we can only produce theorist graduates rather than graduates with practical hands-on experience in the field."*

Against this backdrop, the dilemma is: public universities and their teachers suffer from lack of funding support and infrastructure, and burdened with academics who have not been able to update their own skills and knowledge in a rapidly changed field let alone teach others. Therefore, they are able to provide education only on the fundamentals, but face problems in linking those fundamentals to the changes taking place in the industry today. The private universities, on the other hand, suffer from a lack of quality teachers and established academics. Thus what is taught there is only the craft, not the philosophy, context, or history of journalism, in other words, producing good technical hands, but not good analytical, research and writing skills.

### 7.0 DISCUSSION: SEARCHING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM

This study finds no clear direction and consistency in the various journalism courses on offer in Bangladesh. Other questions concern the level of courses and how they tie into each other, the type and consistency of the course curriculum, and the duration and overall quality of education. Similarly, the recent proliferation of journalism departments makes some respondents wonder about the prospects of future graduates. Thus, it is evident that journalism education has ended up as neither fish nor fowl in Bangladesh; it feels itself unappreciated, sometimes barely tolerated by the industry over the last half century. This study has found that it is also a matter of debate among educators themselves as to what should be the suitable curriculum framework, though they have a common understanding that students must be given opportunities to develop their skills, as required by the media industry, alongside nurturing their intellectual potential.

Journalism, since its emergence in Bangladesh, embraces a spirit of positive contribution to the common welfare of the people. Rahman (2016) and Ullah (2013) observe that the role of media is of supreme importance in Bangladesh where media professionals often serve the general public in a climate of political instability, when basic political institutions have yet to consolidate. Presumably, this stand indicates that journalists must be well educated to achieve these goals of political interpretation and a social justice orientation. Evidence supports the notion that the expanding body of literature on the progress of journalism practice in Bangladesh has actualized this value, serving to rethink journalism's role in society by invoking old or new notions of the public service ideal. Journalism educators here consider that to mean that the study of social and political sciences, and even history, must not be separated from curricula; rather encouraging the incorporation of a wide range of subjects.

It is obvious in terms of the general ethics of journalism practice that at every stage of reporting and editing, a news story requires adequate information, objective explanation, and a justification of its newsworthiness. A necessary part of teaching students how to "do" journalism is to not only familiarize

them with theories, but also to make the relevance and application of those theories and justifications topics for discussion. Again, assumptions must be questioned: does this practice serve the community? If so, how? And if not, can the practice be changed? Considering these factors, journalism educators in Bangladesh can follow three pathways suggested by Mike Gasher in a Canadian context, who argues, “Journalism educators could do a better job of serving their students and serving journalism by adhering more faithfully to the three aspects of university mission - research, teaching and community service” (Gasher, 2005: 670). Following such, this study recommends that Bangladeshi journalism curriculum should cover media structures, critical analysis of media content, the role of media in society, and, in some cases, media management and business practices. The argument supports the three modes of journalism curriculum as suggested by UNESCO, which emphasizes trade craft, the role of journalism in society, and non-journalism courses that expand the student’s knowledge base in relation to the world.

Shifts in journalism education indicate that when one considers the variety of disciplines and paradigms deployed to understand journalism, another contentious factor emerges: a perceived clash of perspectives coming from scholars trained in critical humanities, with those in the social sciences and in light of globalization and technology intervention. Between and within these relations, there exists such a variety of approaches to journalism that laments the local inconsistency of the field as well as the impossibility of generating a more or less consensual body of knowledge out of the existing literature. This study has found that despite having lots of issues to work together in preparing a comprehensive and common curriculum, Bangladesh does not have any networking among journalism departments to address the challenges collectively. Scarcity of research evidence is also a major hindrance to any concrete framework for course curricula and pedagogy. Forming a council for journalism education can help to standardize the course curricula for universities.

Deuze (2006), Papoutsaki (2007) and Zelizer (2000) identified two distinctly different positions for journalism education in society: the ‘follower mode,’ in which the mission of the department or program reflects the actual wants and needs of the profession; and the ‘innovator mode,’ in which journalism training is seen as a development laboratory, preparing students for a changing future rather than a static present. Bierhoff and Schmidt (1997:6) conclude their analysis of these two positions: “the media industry often says it wants the latter but expects the first.” Professional journalists in Bangladesh seem to be taking the same stance in recruiting beginners, as Zahedul Pintu says, “*nowadays more students from journalism departments are coming into the profession, because media organizations prefer journalism graduates as they possess some news sense and have some knowledge about the industry.*”

Journalism education in general tends to be based on a classic model of the profession, defined by its occupation ideology, its history of professionalization, and its privileged role in a democratic society. Deuze (2006:25) argues that a more differentiated mission might prepare students for an increasingly complex future; if one takes the combined technological (digitalization and convergence), economic (commercialization and corporatization), and social (multiculturalism and globalization) changes to the existing worldwide media ecology into consideration. Such developments do not necessarily change the role of journalism in society. Echoing this, discussions groups (called syndicates) at the 1st World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) in 2007 concluded that journalism education needs to be put in context. Practice and theory need to be explained so that all can understand journalism’s extremely important role in society. Preferring a social responsibility model of the journalism profession, WJEC states:

*“Journalism education should be a mix of theory and practice. Core skills and an understanding of journalism’s scholarly body of knowledge are essential. Journalism education should include instructions on reporting (news gathering – text, sound, image, interviewing), writing (telling stories – text, sound, image, news and features, analyzing, processing, transmitting), and ethics”* (Goodman, 2007:13).

Understandably, this motivation for journalism education is at least partly based on its function as the backbone of the journalistic profession. Educators, therefore, cannot ignore demands from the profession; in fact, they need to consider the overall climate of the industry and society at large when preparing the curricula. Bangladeshi journalism educators generally accept journalism’s role in public life but acknowledgement of its media’s commercial nature is also found in a few sites--particularly among private university faculties. For example, ULAB introduced film, advertisement, public relations, and business and financial journalism in its curriculum, which indicates its pro-industry approach of education, and thereby attracts students. Public university educators however strongly opposed the teaching of trade courses (advertising and public relations) in journalism because these courses are more relevant to marketing or business studies rather than to journalism. A sales-oriented tendency can be observed when one examines private universities’ syllabi. In contrast, the public universities’ sociological emphasis links media with politics which perpetuates confusion among educators trying to decide on a suitable curriculum that would address the market demand alongside promoting the students’ intellectual esteem.

The other important contextual factor marking the culture of journalism and journalism education in Bangladesh lies in the history of colonialism. Colonialism affects the epistemology of journalism as well as education, and the legacy is embodied in its curricula. In addition to the discomfort of journalism educators due to the lack of necessary funds for their departments at public universities, the gap between professionals and the availability of research materials and equipment has exacerbated the crisis. For example, none of the journalism departments even have a laboratory newspaper (CU had one during 1995-96 and RU launched one in March 2012). Each of these departments receives only around taka five lakh (US\$6,000) as yearly allocation for research and studies. While addressing the lack of a campus radio would not require a huge investment or physical resources, no department possesses a training-oriented campus radio station. Moshir Rahman, RU MCJ Chairman, explains, “*Both public and private university journalism departments are often treated as the step-brother within the universities, receiving scant resources to meet the challenges of the profession and a changing marketplace.*” Although television has boomed in the last few years, only three universities have studios for television production.

Lee (2008:63) has advocated for liberal arts education in the Asian region by saying that studies in these disciplines can provide a broad knowledge base and will enable students to be more adaptive to the rapidly changing world. This analysis reveals the discrepancies in the concepts of journalism as profession and journalism education within and between different contexts. Journalism is sometimes understood as a distinct field of its own and at other times is also seen as part of the general media area. However, there has been an agreement on journalism’s public service and nation-building role since the advent of the profession in the region that now composes Bangladesh. In spite of this, studies still find no agreement on what journalism itself is, and whether it is a part of the larger media landscape or a distinct field. Neither is there a shared view on whether journalism is a trade or a profession. In fact, journalism needs to act more like a profession and less as trade, an assumption embodied in the emergence and development of journalism education in this country.

There is also controversy about who should teach journalism now and, as noted above, how they should approach it philosophically (coach or player?). Loo (2001) examines the notion of journalism education and suggests that neither a doctoral qualification nor some professional experience necessarily leads to effective journalism teaching in the classroom. Against this backdrop, it assumes journalism pedagogy needs to catch up with the new media technologies and adapt to some of its interactivity and peer-to-peer features. Participants in the first WJEC suggested changes in journalism education at universities, where lecturers often expound on theories without engaging students. Instead, courses should stress independent student work, with students negotiating their own assignments and submitting to peer assessment. Young faculty members are of the view that teachers should become facilitators of learning, moderators of space who liaise with the industry and adapt the curriculum to the changing atmosphere. With this change, the classes would no longer remain mere sessions of information transfer and dictation, but rather become active centers of facilitation, much like the online journalist who guides the reader interactively through the news.

The other issue is the lack of cooperation between media professionals and media academics. Conventional university education in Bangladesh is not flexible enough to allow adjunct professionals to teach in the classrooms. Though a regular exchange of ideas between and among professionals and educators can enrich levels of understanding on both sides, journalism departments don’t encourage young professionals to come lecture in their institutions, and professionals are reluctant to receive any consultation from academics for their continued professional and intellectual development. This gap of interaction has deepened the crisis in finding an acceptable solution for the development of course curricula. In addressing the overall crisis, journalism educators could constitute an association and arrange regular dialogues among themselves and between educators and professional journalists. An advisory board is recommended, one that is composed of mainly of media professionals and senior journalism educators for developing indigenous teaching material around national needs and contexts. UGC can sponsor a national training institute that would bring educators and professionals together to explore methods of improving the profession and strengthening journalism education to produce employable graduates. Educators need to conduct practical research to find immediate applications for the industry. Annual surveys of communication and journalism graduates and pedagogical research need to be done in each department to stay informed of the state of their graduates in the job market and identify any shortcomings in the curricula design.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

The overall situation indicates that journalism educators and media professionals in Bangladesh have a deep understanding of the need for high-quality journalism education more than ever before to cope with the enormous growth of private media houses, increased job opportunities for skilled graduates, new media

intervention, and particularly this sector's job requirements. Secondly, both sides acknowledge that despite the influences of globalization, privatization, and, corporatization of the media industry, the fact remains that the most important mission of journalism--public service--is still embodied in the core ethics of the media professions. Under these circumstances, it is observed that if anything has changed, journalism must encompass its ever-expanding responsibilities in the context of Bangladesh. These new dimensions of change demand competent, well-rounded, and intelligent professionals more than ever to critically analyze an issue to serve the common welfare of the people rather than be confined merely to descriptive journalism.

Thirdly, to act as a 'watch tower' of society, it is no longer enough for the media or journalists to inform, educate and entertain, but journalists must engage, enlighten, and inspire people to ensure good and accountable governance in all spheres of public life and to ensure the overall development of the people, nation, and society at large through their activities enriched by knowledge acquired from the classroom. To shoulder the responsibilities, professional journalists must possess strong core skills, a deep-rooted understanding of local and international politics, political economy, professional values, and high ethical standards. This is where a sound journalism education can make the difference. Without combining liberal arts, social sciences, and vocational training for newsgathering and writing skills, journalism education would be a half-hearted practice and present a mere contradiction of the modern university's mission of teaching, research, and community service.

This study finally asserts that the ultimate purpose of journalism education is to build a band of conscious, committed, competitive, courageous, and compassionate professionals and nation-builders. Educational institutions need to produce champions of both professionalism and public interest and thus an amalgamation of different subject matter is recommended for journalism education. It also proposes splitting the curricula into two major focuses: core and allied. Core courses will include subject orientation, interdisciplinary background, basic and applied skills in all spheres of media, theoretical and empirical research, and internships in media houses. Students must take all core courses at the honors level to sharpen their understandings of the complex socio-political issues of the globalized world. The master's-level curricula would present a combination of core and optional courses to be divided as mandatory and optional. Optional courses must be more practically oriented, covering applied journalism for the journalism tract and development communication for the communication tract. In every case, all optional courses at the master's level must combine the theory and applied topics at a 30:70 ratio, thereby enabling students to acquire necessary professional skills and competencies from the ground before entering a job.

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**Mohammad Sahid Ullah** is attached to the Centre for Communication and Social Change, School of Communication and Arts, University of Queensland, Australia. The best paper winner of the First World Journalism Education Congress paper competition. Ullah served for Law Section of the IAMCR as Co-Vice chair and Co-chair for a decade (2006-2015). He published in the International Communication Gazette, Journal of Science Communication and the Media Asia. He can be reached at email: m.ullah2@uq.edu.au /ullah\_sahid@yahoo.co.uk

**Rawshon Akhter** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication and Journalism, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. Prior to her academic career she worked for different vernaculars in Bangladesh as Reporter and Consultant editor including the largest circulated daily *Dainik Prothom Alo* and *Dainik Kaler Kantho*. She published in the Journal of Science Communication and Mass Communicators. She can be reached at Email:rawshon2007\_cu@yahoo.com